Doda, Kishtwar, and Ramban primitive" lifestyles in the Himalayas

The districts of **Doda, Kishtwar, and Ramban** (collectively part of the Chenab Valley) are home to some of the most resilient and "primitive" lifestyles in the Himalayas. Because of their extreme vertical topography and historic isolation, these regions have preserved ancient social, architectural, and survival traits that pre-date modern industrialization.

Here are the facts and evidence of these traditional ways of living:

1. The Megalithic Evidence (Pre-historic Living)

Recent archaeological investigations in **Kishtwar** have uncovered megalithic structures—large stone monuments—similar to those found in Burzahom (Kashmir).

- **The Fact:** These large standing stones (menhirs) suggest that ancient inhabitants had sophisticated ritualistic and funerary practices involving the movement of massive stones, a hallmark of Neolithic and Megalithic societies.
- **The Evidence:** Findings in sites like **Paddar** and parts of Kishtwar show that these stones were likely used to mark territory or appease local deities, a practice that continued in some forms until the medieval period.

2. Transhumance: The Nomadic Pulse

The Chenab Valley is one of the last bastions of true **transhumance** (seasonal migration).

- **The Fact:** The **Gaddis** (Hindus) and **Bakarwals** (Muslims) follow a primitive migration pattern that has remained unchanged for centuries. They move their livestock (sheep and goats) from the lowlands of Ramban to the high alpine pastures (Dhars) of Doda and Kishtwar.
- **Primitive Trait:** Their dependence on the "Dhar" (high-altitude meadow) system and their temporary stone-and-mud shelters (*Kotes*) are identical to the dwellings used by their ancestors 500 years ago.

3. Ancient Engineering: "Pillar-less" Bridges

Before modern steel bridges, the people of the Chenab used ingenious "primitive" engineering to cross the ferocious Chenab River and its tributaries.

- **The Fact:** Early travelers like **G.T. Vigne (1829)** documented the use of rope bridges (*Jhulas*) and cradle crossings.
- **The Evidence:** * **The Chika:** A simple wooden seat attached to a strong rope tied between two rocks. The passenger is pulled across the gorge by hand.
    - **The Twined Rope Bridge:** Made of birch-bark or willow-twig ropes, these bridges lacked pillars and relied entirely on tension. While most have been replaced, the knowledge of weaving these ropes remains a "living fossil" of local engineering.

4. Vernacular Architecture: The "Kath-Kuni" Style

Traditional houses in Doda and Kishtwar are built using a primitive seismic-resistant technique known as **Kath-Kuni** (meaning "wood-corner").

- **The Fact:** This involves layering deodar wood and dry stones without any mortar.
- **Primitive Trait:** This style is perfectly adapted to the cold climate and high seismic activity of the region. The use of "unbaked bricks" (sun-dried mud) in older structures, such as the now-demolished **Doda Fort**, highlights a reliance on local, raw materials rather than imported industrial goods.

5. Folk Beliefs and Deities (Nag Culture)

The region retains a strong **Nag (Serpent) Cult**, which is one of the oldest forms of nature worship in the Himalayas.

- **The Fact:** Almost every village in **Bhadarwah (Doda)** and **Ramban** has a "Nag Temple" located near a natural spring.
- **The Evidence:** * **Thali Dance (Ramban):** An ancient rhythmic dance performed with metal plates to appease local deities during *Kirtans*.
    - **Sacred Springs:** Springs like the **Gomainag** in Kishtwar are still worshipped. This reflects a primitive worldview where nature (water, snakes, and mountains) is seen as a living, divine entity that must be appeased for the safety of the community.

6. Dietary Preservation

Because of long winters and isolation, the people of Doda and Kishtwar still practice ancient food preservation.

- **The Fact:** The consumption of **Hokhe Syun** (dried vegetables) and **Anardana** (wild pomegranate seeds) as a staple is a direct link to a time before refrigeration.
- **Primitive Trait:** The storage of grains in large wooden chests (*Sandooks*) and the communal use of water-powered flour mills (**Gharats**) are still visible in remote villages of the Dessa and Marwah-Wadwan valleys.

Summary with Table

The discovery of the colossal Deodar tree in **Chanti Bala, Bhalessa**, serves as a living monument to the "primitive" and sacred relationship the people of the Chenab Valley maintain with their environment. Standing with a

massive **54-foot trunk girth**, this specimen of *Cedrus deodara*—a name derived from the Sanskrit *Devadaru*, meaning "Tree of the Gods"—is not merely a botanical marvel but a cornerstone of local spiritual life. For centuries, the inhabitants of the Gandoh tehsil have treated this site as a sanctuary, reinforcing the "Nag" and nature-worship traits prevalent in the region where ancient groves are often considered the dwelling places of deities. The tree’s survival for over half a millennium is a direct result of this traditional protection; while much of the world's ancient forests fell to industrialization, the Bhalessa community’s ancestral reverence provided a primitive form of conservation that modern forestry is only now documenting.

The presence of such a giant in the **Bhaderwah Forest Division** further highlights the isolation and extreme climate of the Bhalessa valleys, including Bunjwah and Gandoh. These areas remain "winter wonderlands" where thick snow blankets the coniferous canopy for months, effectively shielding these ancient giants from outside interference. The local demand to recognize Chanti Bala as a heritage site reflects a transition where traditional sacredness meets modern conservation. This tree stands as the ultimate evidence of the region’s "primitive" lifestyle—one where the boundary between the human, the divine, and the forest is blurred, and where the preservation of a single tree can span dozens of generations, linking the medieval past of the Doda district to its ecological future.

asheer Top is special because it’s been around for a long time. People have written about it in old records called takri. These records tell us that Gasheer Top has a lot of history hidden in its snowy hills.

The Top, located in the Eastern part of Bhalessa Chilly Pingal tehsil, boasts a picturesque landscape surrounded by villages like Budhli, Kalamol, Champal, and Amrey to the east, while Chanyas, Challa, and Amrit Pura lie to the west. To the north, it borders Bojwah Kither, and to the south, you’ll find Malik Pura, Manoie, Bhatyas Bathri Bagli, and Kahara. Although a road exists up to Gondow, a few miles away from Gasheer Top, there’s a need for road construction to enhance accessibility. The area hosts a tourism mela every summer, featuring a mud-made mosque where people practice Islamic prayers. Gasheer Top sits at an elevation of 10,000 feet above sea level, offering educational seasonal centers.

The local Pahari ethnicity is deeply rooted, with residents engaging in cattle rearing and grazing. The topography defines Gasheer Top’s unique ethnicity. For those planning to visit, reaching Gasheer Top involves traversing through Gondow, and a road construction initiative could further facilitate the journey.

The location’s charm extends to neighboring scenic spots like Mehad Moti Bagra, Bal Padri, Dagan, and Mehlwar Pass, creating a rich tapestry of natural beauty in the region. The place enjoys a whispering Takri Records. Gasheer Top’s story unfolds in the subtle strokes of the takri records, an ancient script that serves as a bridge between the past and the present. As one delves into these records, fragments of a forgotten narrative emerge, painting a vivid picture of a place that time forgot. The historical significance of Gasheer Top becomes a compelling reason to embark on a journey of discovery.

As the traveler approaches Gasheer Top, the landscape transforms into a mesmerizing canvas. Jakyas, Chanyas, Gondow, and Budhli, neighboring areas, weave together a tapestry of natural beauty. The dhok, carpeted with pristine snow, stands as a tranquil structure, beckoning adventurers and nature enthusiasts alike to witness its beauty.

In the echoes of time, the Takri records reveal a rich tapestry of history, weaving tales of antiquities in Bhalessa. Among these, Nargowari and Gasheer Top have a mention in history. The archives department record reveals the presence of it in the takri record.
According to the historical records, Labh Joo Kardar of Bhalessa played a pivotal role in the leasing out of these two Dhars, Gasheer Top and Nooran Gowari. In the annals of history, it is believed that this transaction occurred during Maharaja Ranbir Singh's reign, adding layers of significance to these places.
The pasture lands, bestowed by Piar Singh Kardar of Bahaderwah Pargana to Laj Singh Kardar of Bhalessa Pargana, formed the backdrop for Labh Joo's actions. Subsequently, Dido Jugani, a prominent figure in the archives of Counsy Lanmu, became a custodian of these lands, as evidenced by a Patta dated 6th Sawan Samvat 1915, corresponding to July 18th, 1858 A.D.
Labh Joo's Patta, a document of historical relevance, sheds light on the leasing of Gasheer Top. The recipients of this lease, Rani Gagan and Basya Thakkar of Pingal, were entrusted with the responsibility of these lands. The lease money, initially set at Rs. 70, underwent an increase, bringing it to Rs. 84. The Sarkar, indicating the ruling authority, was entitled to recover this amount along with grazing dues.

Discover more
News Paper
Horticulture
Geographic Reference

As the translation of Labh Joo's Patta unfolds, it becomes evident that the leasing of this place was a meticulously observed process. The responsibility entrusted to Rani Gagan and Basya Thakkar underscores the significance of these lands, not merely as geographic entities but as custodians of a historical legacy.
In the records of Labh Joo Kardar of Bhalessa, Noran Gowari, and Gasheer Top continue to echo with the whispers of their past, their stories embedded in the very soil that has witnessed centuries of change. These antiquities, mentioned in the Takri records, serve as a testament to the intricate dance of history, culture, and governance in the picturesque land of Bhalessa.
The place truly comes alive in winter, a wonderland draped in snow, reflecting the purity of its untouched surroundings. The cold breeze carries tales of the past, creating an atmosphere of serenity. The air is filled with the promise of adventure, inviting mountaineers and trekkers to explore its untamed beauty.
This hotspot with its untapped potential, holds the key to economic prosperity for the region. However, the journey towards realizing this potential requires the creation of essential tourist infrastructure. The call for tourist huts and improved road connectivity becomes a chorus echoing through the valleys, urging development that harmonizes with nature.
Gasheer Top isn't just a destination; it is a catalyst for transforming Bhalessa into an adventure hub. Amidst the three tehsils of Gandoh, Chilly Pingal, and Kahara, this 'Dhok' adds vibrant hues to the canvas of Bhalessa's adventurous spirit. It is a place where history meets nature, creating a unique blend that captivates the soul.
As it celebrates its place in history, a vision for the future takes shape. It is a future where tourists, guided by the whispers of takri records, embark on a journey to Gasheer Top, a place where history and nature dance hand in hand. The development envisioned, marked by tourist huts and improved link road connectivity, becomes imperative to the commitment to embracing the past while paving the way for a vibrant future.
Gasheer Top not only boasts historical significance and breathtaking landscapes but also emerges as a haven for diverse avian species. Among its feathered inhabitants are migratory birds such as Nail and Gur Kako, adding a dynamic and vibrant dimension to its natural allure. The presence of Shaheen further enhances Gasheer Top's reputation as a hotspot for birdwatchers, providing a unique opportunity to witness these majestic creatures in their natural habitat. The harmonious coexistence of history, nature, and wildlife makes Gasheer Top a truly enchanting destination for those seeking a rich and immersive experience.

Gasheer Top awaits, ready to share its story with those who dare to venture into its snow-clad realm, a journey that leaves an indelible mark on the souls of those who visit here. The government needs to identify this place and bring it under the ambit of the state tourism policy. There is a dire need to organize a Gasheer Tourism Festival to gauge its Potential and provide an inner approach road, a Tourism Reception center, and Infrastructure facilities.

Dhoks (seasonal high-altitude shelters) in the Doda, Kishtwar, and Ramban by the Pahari dwellers districts of Jammu are temporary settlements used by pahari dwellers including Hindus and Muslims These areas face harsh winter isolation.

- **High-Altitude Risks:** Dhoks are often located in remote, high-altitude areas that are prone to avalanches, especially at altitudes above 2,500 meters.

Transhumance in the Doda, Kishtwar, and Ramban districts of Jammu and Kashmir is a seasonal, climate-driven migration of all the communities including Pahari tribe and Hindus and Muslims who move their livestock between lowland winter pastures and highland summer pastures. This traditional practice is crucial for the livelihoods of thousands of families and for the sustainability of the region's ecology

- **Migration Timing and Routes:** Pastoralists move from the plains of Jammu/Ramban towards the high-altitude pastures of Kashmir, Doda, and Kishtwar in late spring and return in early autumn.

Challenges and Support

Category	Traditional Trait	Location
Monuments	Megalithic Standing Stones	Kishtwar (Paddar region)
Mobility	Gaddi-Bakarwal Transhumance	Ramban & Doda Meadows
Transport	Chika (Cradle) & Rope Bridges	River Chenab crossings
Housing	Kath-Kuni (Wood-Stone layering)	Rural Doda and Kishtwar
Worship	Nag Cult (Nature Worship)	Bhadarwah & Ramban Springs

- The migration face risks from severe weather, lack of grazing land, and health risks to animals, as noted in reports.
-